

AMENDMENT

In the Claims

Please amend claims 1, 2, 4, 7, 10, and 13-17 as follows:

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1. (Amended) A computerized method of comparing proper names, comprising the steps of:
 - obtaining data representing a first proper name that designates an entity and a second proper name;
 - converting the data representing said first and second names to first and second pronunciation equivalent phonetic alphabet representations, equivalent to at least respective portions of said first and second names;
 - comparing said first and second pronunciation equivalent phonetic alphabet representations to determine a likelihood that said second name also designates the entity; and
 - producing a signal indicating said likelihood that said second name designates the entity.
 2. (Amended) The method of claim 1 wherein said data representing said first proper name and said second proper name is obtained as a string of characters.
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4. (Amended) The method of claim 1 including the further step of processing at least one of said first and second names to assign to said at least one of said first and second names one of a set of categories of likely ethnic origin of said at least one of said first and second names, wherein said comparison of said first and second phonetic alphabet representations is performed according to an algorithm that varies depending on said assigned category of likely ethnic origin.

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7. (Amended) A computerized method of searching a database containing records associated with a plurality of different proper names to find at least one record matching an input proper name, comprising the steps of:

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converting at least a portion of the different proper names in the database to a pronunciation equivalent phonetic alphabet representation equivalent to at least a portion of said respective proper names;

assigning said pronunciation equivalent phonetic alphabet representation as keys for records in said database corresponding to said different proper names;

receiving data representing the input proper name as a string of characters;

converting the data representing said input proper name using the same said pronunciation equivalent phonetic alphabet representation, equivalent to at least a portion of said input proper name;

comparing said phonetic alphabet representation of said input proper name to said record keys to determine a likelihood that said input proper name represents an entity associated with said record;

eliminating as potential matches those records for which the likelihood that said input proper name represents the entity associated with said record key falls below a predetermined threshold; and

processing the records remaining after said eliminating step as potential matches for said input proper name.

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10. (Amended) The method of claim 7 including the further step of processing said input proper name to assign to said input proper name one of a set of categories of likely ethnic origin of said input proper name, wherein said comparison of said phonetic alphabet representation to said record keys is performed according to an algorithm that varies depending on said assigned category of likely ethnic origin.

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13. (Amended) A name processing and matching system comprising:

a database containing a plurality of proper names and records associated respectively with said proper names, wherein each one of said proper names represents an entity;

database processing means associated with said database for creating, for each of said plurality of proper names, a pronunciation equivalent phonetic alphabet representation of at least a portion of said proper name using a phonetic alphabet;

input receiving means for receiving data representing an input proper name, wherein the data representing the input proper names is received as a string of characters;

phonetic processing means associated with said input receiving means for creating a pronunciation equivalent phonetic alphabet representation of at least a portion of said input proper name using said phonetic alphabet;

comparison means associated with said database processing means and said phonetic processing means for comparing said pronunciation equivalent phonetic alphabet representation of said input proper name to said pronunciation equivalent phonetic alphabet representations of said proper names to determine, for each of said proper names, a likelihood that said input proper name represents the same entity as said proper name; and

output means associated with said comparison means for eliminating as potential matches those records associated with a proper name for which the likelihood that said input proper name represents the entity represented by said proper name falls below a predetermined threshold, and for processing the records remaining after said eliminating function as potential matches for said input proper name.

14. (Amended) The system of claim 13 wherein each of said plurality of proper names consists of a string of characters.

15. (Amended) The system of claim 13 wherein said phonetic alphabet is an International Phonetic alphabet.

16. (Amended) The system of claim 13 further comprising name classifying means for processing said input proper name to assign one of a set of categories of likely ethnic

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origin of said input proper name, wherein said comparison means comprises variable processing means for performing said comparison of said pronunciation equivalent phonetic alphabet representation of said input proper name to said pronunciation equivalent phonetic alphabet representations of said proper names according to an algorithm that varies depending on said assigned category of likely ethnic origin.

17. (Amended) The system of claim 16 wherein said variable processing means compares different portions of said pronunciation equivalent phonetic alphabet representation of said input proper name to said pronunciation equivalent phonetic alphabet representations of said proper names, depending on said assigned category of likely ethnic origin.
